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The Gazette (Montreal, Quebec, Canada) · Sat, Nov 1, 1975 · Page 45
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SPIN OFF

Sweet and sad

Prisoner In Disguise (Asylum), the new album by Linda Ronstadt, expands on the directions set down on Heart Like A Wheel, her previous effort. In fact, five of the eleven songs are by songwriters whose works appeared on the previous album.

Ronstadt is a great singer of sweet and sad country-folk-rock love songs — and they comprise most of the album. However, when she gets into R & B, as she does on Holland, Dozier and Holland's 'Heat Wave', it just doesn't work. Another failure is Dolly Parton's, I Will Always Love You — and the opening cut, Love Is A Rose, is as lame as any other Neil Young song.

The best cut is You Tell Me That I'm Falling Down, by Montreal songwriter Anna McGarrigle, who also wrote the lovely title song from the Heart Like A Wheel album. Other highlights are James Taylor's Hey Mister, That's Me Up On The Juke Box; Smokey Robinson's classic Tracks Of My Tears; Jimmy Cliff's Many Rivers To Cross; Lowell George's Roll 'Em Easy; J. D. Souther's title song Prisoner In Disguise; and The Sweetest Gift, an old country song that she sings in harmony with Emmy Lou Harris.

There is just no denying the fact that when Ronstadt opens up on some slow and sad song, she can be just great.

One of the most interesting stories on the music scene is that of Leon Redbone, who says that he just sings old songs. In 1970, he popped up on the Toronto folk scene, and since then his self-perpetuated legend began to spread. At the 1972 Mariposa Folk Festival, Bob Dylan showed up looking for him.

Following that festival he began to sell out his club and concert appearances solely on the basis of word of mouth. He was refusing all offers to record. However, in September of last year — when he sold out his two Montreal concerts — he said he was finally going to go into the studio.

The resulting album, **On The Track** (Warner Bros.) is a gem. Redbone runs through 11 old country, jazz and ragtime tunes in his own unique and infectious style.

Upfront is his great guitar playing and scat vocals — while a laid back studio band applies the appropriate back-up. On several cuts the legendary jazz violinist Joe Venuti does some marvelous things with his bow.

There's no message to this album. Just Leon Redbone and Co. sounding like they had a lot of fun doing this record. Fats Waller, whose work is featured along with that of Irving Berlin and Jimmie Rodgers, would have approved.

— **Mike Regenstrief**

Budding Hearts

If you are into catching budding superstars before they burst into full bloom, then check out Vancouver group Heart's new album **Dreamboat Annie** (Mushroom Records).

The band is built around sisters Ann and Nancy Wilson, who write all the material and have everything it takes to becoe huge world-wise. The reception the group received when opening the show for Rod Stewart here recently has rarely been equalled for an opening act in Montreal.

The album begins with their recent smash, Magic Man, which is already well on its way to being a classic.

The flow from the hauntingly beautiful Dreamboat Annie into Fantasy Child — featuring Nancy Wilson on accoustic guitar — into the electrically wild Crazy on You captures the diversity of the band.

But it is Ann Wilson's vocals as much as anything that gives Heart the magic that lifts them above excellence. The most exciting vocalist to come along in years, she has both power and sensitivity in her delivery. She can be tenderly romantic, as on I'll Be Your Song, or loose and funny as in White Lightning and Wine.

Sing Child features some deliciously rude guitar by Roger Fisher, while How Deep It Goes is a love song with a wistfully melodic beauty and touching lyrics. And through all, the title cut Dreamboat Annie drifts in and out as if searching for a home.

George Harrison hit the heights with All Things Must Pass, but has been unable to come close with any of his subsequent albums. His new one, Extra Texture, is perhaps better than his last but he seems to have lost his earlier magic.

The album is excellently produced and all of his famous friends are in fine fettle musically — but where the album falls down is in the mediocre quality of his material. The songs are mainly plodding, uninspired, and unmemorable.

You, is the brightest song on the album, with some good saxophone coming to the fore in a Phil Spector-ish production and This Guitar is Still Crying is an interesting sequel to While My Guitar Gently Weeps, but without the inspiration of the latter.

It is a nice album but one expects a little more than that from George Harrison.

—**Doug Pringle**

Ordinary song

Just like everybody else, Mr. Ordinary Superstar, Johnny Rodgers, is into music.

He loves rock and disco and soul music, and used to be a singer in bands in his high school days. When he's not putting out his usual 110 per cent on the football field, he's living it up on the dance floor or flipping his lid between stereo earphones.

It was inevitable that Johnny R. should record a single — appropriately entitled The Ordinary Superstar. Not only does Rodgers display his pseudo-Barry White vocal chords (he's a mite better than White), but he also wrote the lyrics. Backed by the schoolgirl chorus of Patsy Gallant and the muddy disco-rock sound of Moonquake, Rodgers utters such "super-bad" lyrics as:

I am going to show 'em the way
Just like it was shown to me
I'm just trying to give them more
Of what they all been askin' for
I'm overpaid, I've got it made
I'm the ORDINARY SUPERSTAR!

During the long instrumental fade-out, he lays on his hip repartee: "Let's do the hustle baby . . . yeah, just you and me, one on one, let's have a little fun." He is right when he says, "I'm not Mahummad Ali, I'm just ordinary me," but that's Johnny's special charm, ain't it? The best football player ever to play in this country has put out one of the better records by and/or about an athlete.

If Johnny R raises enough of a rumpus in the discos of ourtown, The Ordinary Superstar might get play elsewhere. If not, it'll still be heard in Nebraska.

— **Juan Rodriguez**

Rock and Pop

Transparent Elton John

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Elton John is releasing records like hotcakes.

It seemed like only yesterday that Captain Fantastic & the Brown Dirt Cowboy came out, but now here is yet another album, **Rock of the Westies (MCA).** A while back he had two songs, Philadelphia Freedom and Pinball Wizard, riding high on the charts. Now, here he is again with Island Girl and the obviously recognizable chorus on Bad Blood, by the 1960s singer he resurrected, Neil Sedaka.

Elton John is clearly the pervasive singer of this era, so instantaneously successful that he himself has admitted he's getting sick of hearing his records on the radio.

Elton John: Ersatz style

NOT HIDDEN

Not that he runs away and hides. He's always turning up somewhere, whether it's a Sunset Strip benefit or hosting the first Rocky Awards on television. He smiles a steely little smile from behind that kaleidoscopic array of spectacles and sunglasses. He pumps into his act at a moment's notice, and he is built up as the master entertainer of his time.

And record sales are booming, not only the new albums but the old ones, too.

What is it in Elton John's sound that makes so many people want to listen to it? It's the transparency: He appeals to nobody in particular but everybody in general. Many marvel at the way he makes the records — the production is so neat, slick. The numbers fly by so quickly, the tunes are so easy to grab hold of. His songs are production jobs alright, but they take their lead from wound-up vocal style.

His voice is strange a non-voice: his style is an ersatz style. His timbre is always the same — if he did not pop out with all his tricky phrasing, one could consider him monotoned. He attacks and stabs at the lyrics, bursting with mannerisms. He makes cliches out of feelings by representing them with formulamatic vocalese — the sudden dips, the strained lilts, the springboard mooning.

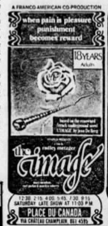
He frets over the exact measurements of his vocals, and nothing else. Nothing is left to chance. His vocal style is technological, approximating effort without sweat. Elton John's voice conveys only slightly more human tonal properties than an electric synthesizer, which is why he has become the record industry's dream.

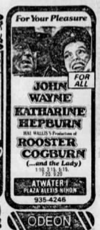
His is the kind of sound that is molded into a package, into advertising, into media — and what's even better, Elton and his coterie (lyricist Bernie Taupin, producer Gus Dudgeon) don't have to be told how to do the molding.

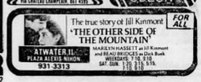
FACILE

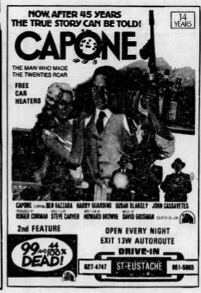
Rock of the Westies features a different backup band than his other albums and the production might be considered his most "adventurous" in a while, but he's become so overtly mechanical that the point is rendered moot. As usual, the lyrics are like comicbook fantasy, as simple and facile as the singer's technique.

Elton John has turned the blues and rock 'n' roll into solid-state components from which there's no leakage of emotion. His style fits with the cold multi-channelled facility of the recording studio and it's setting the pace for a growing number of equally transparent, and vacant (with not even the glamor), imitators.









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